



Writing an IEP

IEP means Individualized Education Program. It is the written paper that says what kind of help your child will get in school. To find out more, ask for our brochure "What is an IEP?"

Is this the first IEP meeting for your child? Then the Team has to talk about the test results. They have to say what disability your child has. They will also say how the disability makes it hard for your child to learn. The Team, including you, has to say if your child can get special (exceptional) education. This is called being **eligible** for special education.

Is your child already in special education? If there are new test results, the Team will talk about them.

At least every 3 years, the IEP Team must decide if more tests are needed. These tests see if your child still has a disability and still needs help learning. Deciding if more tests are needed is called **re-evaluation**. The school must have your written OK to do more or new tests. The Team can decide:

- Your child still needs special education and no new tests are needed
- Your child still needs special education but new tests are needed
- Your child no longer needs special education

The IEP Team decides how much your child needs to learn. Your child must study the same

things as other kids their age and grade. This is true no matter what class your child is in. This is called **access to the general education curriculum**.

What if your child is in a class just for children with disabilities? They still must learn the same subjects as students their age and grade without disabilities.

Some children with the most severe disabilities are taught things that other children their age have already learned. An 8 year old might be working on feeding herself or how to wash her hands.



An older student might be working on reading words on signs, like "Exit" or "Restroom". Goals like these are called **functional goals** or **life skills**, which means useful in daily life. This is different from the general education curriculum.

Does your child have life skill goals? **They must still learn the same things as other students the same age.** Ask the IEP Team which of your child's goals come from the general education curriculum.

What if your child doesn't know as much as the other students? How will he or she learn? Things can be made simpler. For example, one student learned about fractions by using measuring cups. This helped him understand that a fraction is part of something.

The things your child will learn next year are called **goals**. The goals are broken into smaller

steps called **objectives**. The IEP Team decides what the goals and objectives are. How do you know which goals would be good for your child? There are 4 questions you should ask about goals:

1. Does the goal make sense to your child?

Your child should know what she or he is trying to learn. If the goal is not clear to you, it won't be clear to your child. The goal should be something important that your child needs to learn.

2. Is the goal done as a natural part of the day? As much as possible, things should be done when other kids do them.

Example: Practice doing zippers when changing clothes for PE or going to the bathroom.

3. Is the goal part of what other children the same age and grade are learning?

It doesn't have to be exactly the same. It might be made simpler. For example, the class is learning to add numbers.

Your child might learn to pick out each number.



4. How will you know when your child has reached the goal? It should be easy to tell whether your child is making progress. The IEP must say how progress is measured. It can be by tests. Or by looking at how often your child shows what s/he has learned. **Example:** Your child is working on holding her pencil the right way. If she uses her pencil for 15 minutes, the teacher counts how long she holds it right.

How do your child's IEP goals fit into what the class is learning? This is important so your child can stay in the general classroom as much as possible.

- Your child's goals may be different. But your child should learn the same kind of thing the class is learning. **Example:** Your child might be learning to recognize a triangle. The class might be learning all

the angles in a triangle. All students are learning about triangles.

- Your child may need to be taught in a different way. **Example:** The class may learn something by reading a book. Your child may need someone to read the book to him or her.
- Your child may need to work in a different way. **Example:** Your child may write on a computer instead of with pencil and paper.

Students with disabilities must learn from the general education curriculum. But the IEP Team decides if your child needs to learn less of it. Deciding what part of the general education curriculum a child will learn is called making **modifications**. The Team decides if this is needed in every class or just part of the time.

The Team also decides if your child needs to be taught or answer in special ways. These are called **accommodations**. For example, he might use a computer to help him read or write. Or she might answer test questions out loud instead of writing. Some children listen to books on tape or CD if they have trouble reading.

Do the teachers need help making these accommodations or modifications? Then the IEP must say what help they will get. The IEP must also say if the teachers will get any other help or training.

The IEP Team decides what services your child gets and how often. This may include:

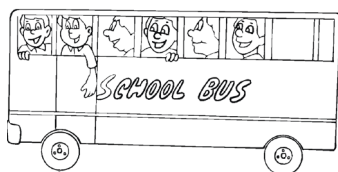
- Getting help from an educational assistant or para-professional. An **educational assistant/para-professional** is an adult who helps your child.
- Interpreter services for students who are deaf
- Nursing services
- Help from a special education teacher



- Help talking or using muscles. These are called related services.
- Travel training to learn how to get around the building and from place to place.

If the IEP says so, your child can ride the bus to school for free. This can be the special education bus or the bus for children without disabilities. Make sure he or she will be safe. Here are some things the IEP Team should talk about:

- Does your child need air conditioning or heating because of medical problems?
- Does your child need a shorter bus ride because of medical problems?
- Does your child need a seat belt or special seating?
- Does your child need an adult along to ride safely on a bus?
- Does the bus need a radio or phone so the driver can call for help?
- Does the bus driver or helper know what to do if your child has an emergency?
- Does your child need help or reminders to get off the bus?
- Is it OK for the driver to leave your child if no one is there to meet him or her?



Make sure the IEP Team knows what your child needs on the bus. The IEP team may ask for a letter from the doctor saying what your child needs. Make sure what the IEP Team decides is written in the IEP.

All the services on an IEP are free. The school can't ask you to pay for something on the IEP. It is against the law for the school to say they can't pay for something in the IEP. The IEP is a legal paper. The school must do what the IEP says.

The IEP says whether your child will take State and District tests. Some of these tests count towards a regular diploma. Some don't. It is very important for you to know whether your child is working towards a high school diploma. Ask

the team this question. Make sure you know the answer.

Is your child 18 or older? Then the IEP Team must decide when your child will **graduate from school**. Your child can go to school until they are 22. But you might want them to go through the graduation ceremony before then. What services will they get after that? The IEP Team must decide.



When students with disabilities turn 18, they make their own decisions. This includes making decisions about the IEP. At 18, it changes from you giving your OK for the IEP to the student giving his or her OK. This is true unless a judge makes you the guardian or conservator.

Your child can go through graduation and still get services until age 22. This is true as long as they **don't get a regular high school diploma**. It is important for the IEP Team to talk about what is best for your child. It is very important to know if your child will get services until age 22. Be sure and ask about this when you discuss graduation.



Is your child going to get services after age 18? Students without disabilities are no longer in high school. They are working or going to college.

How can your child be with students without disabilities who are the same age?

After students are 18, they should be at work or college. This is where people the same age without disabilities will be. The school should give your child services, but in a different place than school. This is an important part of what the IEP Team decides. Be sure your child is there to let you know what he or she wants.

Where will your child learn?

The last thing the IEP Team decides is placement.

Placement is where your child will learn. This doesn't mean the exact class. It means the kind of class. This can be a class with only students with disabilities. **OR** a class with students without disabilities. **OR** it could be spending part of the day in each kind.

The IEP Team can't talk about placement until the IEP is done. The Team can't decide where to teach your child until they know what will be taught.

Every child must be with students without disabilities as much of the day as possible. This is called being in the **least restrictive environment or LRE**.

What choices does the IEP Team have for where your child will learn? Your child could be:

- in the general classroom **all** day **OR**
- in the general classroom **part** of the day. Where is your child the rest of the time? Your child might be in the resource room or a therapy room part of the day. Or in a class only for students with disabilities for part of the day **OR**
- in a class just for students with disabilities **most** of the day **OR**
- in a class just for students with disabilities **all** day. This should only be done if the other places have been tried and didn't work. This is because your child has a right to be in the least restrictive environment.



Is your child in a class just for students with disabilities? Your child should still spend part of the day with students without disabilities. It can be for part of a class, art, music, computer, PE, recess and lunch.

Any time your child **isn't** in the general education classroom the school must explain why. IDEA law says this must be done in writing as part of your child's IEP.



It is important for you to understand what the school wants to do. Parents and the school have to agree on where a child will learn. You have to give this OK in writing. You have the right to say "yes" if you agree. You have the right to say "no" if you don't agree. Ask for our brochure "**If you and the school disagree.**"

The IEP Team must make sure that your child is in the best place to learn. **Example:** Does your child have a hard time changing classes? Should your child stay in one room all day? Or does your child need to learn to change classes?



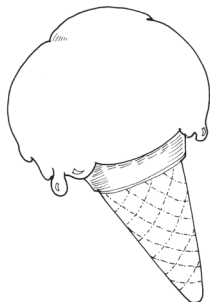
The IEP Team must talk about which place would be best for your child. They must decide if either place would be bad for your child. The IEP Team must pick the best place for your child. Your child may spend part of the day in one place and part in another place.

Why does the IDEA law want students with and without disabilities to learn together? Because it is the best way for children to learn. Many people have studied this. The studies found that when students with and without disabilities learn together:

- All students are accepted.
- Students make friends and have fun with each other.
- Students learn that being different is OK.
- Students have more time with the teacher.
- Everyone is more a part of the class.
- Students learn to get along with others.
- Students feel better about themselves.
- Students behave better.
- Students do more things for themselves.
- Students get the help they need.
- Students spend more time learning, learn from each other and learn more.

Inclusion means every child is welcome in schools, classrooms and school activities. Every child has a chance to be included with students without disabilities. Every child gets the help he or she needs to learn. Inclusion is important because it means children don't get left out because of disability.

Have you ever been in an ice cream store? You can choose from all the different kinds of ice cream. You don't have to go to a different store if you only like chocolate. You don't have to stand in a different line if you can't eat nuts. You don't have to sit in a different room if you only eat vanilla. Everyone comes into the same store. Everyone stands in the same line. Everyone has a chance to get any ice cream they want.



Schools should be like ice cream shops. Children should be in the same building. Every child should have a chance to pick from all the school has to offer. All the children should learn together.

Inclusion does **NOT** mean that kids with disabilities are just put in general classrooms. IEP Teams have to make sure the students get the supports and services they need. IEP Teams make sure teachers get the help they need to do a good job. This helps all the students in the class learn better.

Why is inclusion important?

Children need to learn together so they can learn to accept people who are different. What happens if children



with disabilities are put in a different class? Sometimes children think students with disabilities are in a different room because they act badly. Separating them teaches children to treat people differently if they have a disability.

This is not good. Everyone should be accepted if they have a disability or not.

Kids that go to school with your child today will grow up. They might someday be an employer who can give your child a job. They may be your child's neighbors. They may be someone who makes the laws about people with disabilities. They might have a child of their own with a disability. It will be important for them to know and like people with disabilities. That is why it is important for them to be in class with your child.

What if your child is a danger to self or other students?

The IEP Team must decide if taking your child out of the general education class would help. The Team must explain how putting your child in a different class would solve the



problem. Does being in a different room just give them different students to hurt? If it would **NOT** solve the problem, your child should stay in the general education class. The IEP Team must give your child behavior help, if needed. This must happen **before** your child is taken out of the general education class.

Will other students understand your child's disability?

The other students need to know why your child does some things differently. This is important so they don't think your child is being different on purpose. One way to help is to tell the class about your child's disability. The IEP Team should talk about the best way to do this.

Sometimes parents tell the class about their child's disability. Sometimes it is the teacher. Some students tell about their own disability. Your child's IEP Team should decide who will tell your child's class.

Will your child want to be there when the class learns about the disability? Talk to your child about it. Tell them what will be said. You and your child should decide if your child will be there or not.

What about pull out?

Sometimes IEP Teams decide to take your child out of the general class for part of the day. This can be to get therapy or work alone with a teacher. IEP Teams call this **pull out** or **resource**. Sometimes pull out is the best way to teach a child. Sometimes it is not. How do you know if it is best for your child? If the IEP Team wants pull out for your child, you should ask:

- Is pull out the best way to teach this skill?
- Why can't the skill be taught in the general classroom?
- Are there ways to change the goal so it could be taught in class?
- While your child is in pull out, she or he misses what is going on in the general classroom. How will your child catch up on what she or he missed?
- How will skills learned in pull out help your child spend **MORE** time in class?

Remember that studies show children with and without disabilities learn better together. If your child is in pull out, she or he is out of the general classroom. Pull out should only be used when it is the best way to teach your child.

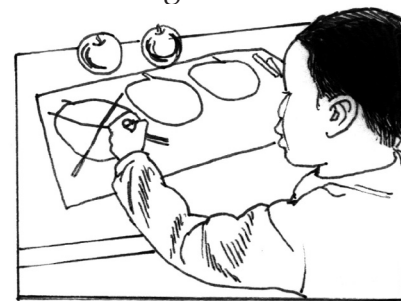


Your child may need changes in how things are taught. This part of special education is called **accommodations**. It can include changes in:

- Where things are taught
- Who teaches
- How things are taught
- How your child can answer and
- What materials are used

The IEP Team decides what changes your child needs. The changes can be anything that helps your child learn. Here are some examples:

- More or different light
- Special chairs or cushions
- Having a table or chair that is lower or higher
- Having a tilted desk top
- Sitting by a window for natural light
- Sitting close to the blackboard
- Sitting away from others
- Standing instead of sitting
- Sitting instead of standing
- Using pictures instead of written words
- Studying with another student
- Having another student take notes for your child
- Working with 2 or 3 other students instead of alone
- Help keeping up with work or supplies
- More time to change activities
- Quiet times or places to study
- Marking papers in different colors
- Making it easy to find supplies
- Having the teacher keep things until your child needs them
- Having bare walls in part of the room to make it easier to study
- Fewer problems on a page
- Large print or dark print
- Having things read aloud
- Using a tape recorder to take notes or give reports
- Using headphones or ear plugs to keep noise out
- Using a special computer
- Using sign language
- Taking breaks and moving around
- More time to do work or tests



These changes should be made only if your child needs it. They can be made no matter what class your child is in.

Special equipment

The IEP Team can get special equipment to help your child learn. This can be:

- Computers that work when you touch the screen
- Computer keyboards or a mouse that is easier to use
- Special computer programs
- Machines that talk for you when you touch a button
- Special cushions or chairs so it is easier to sit
- Pens that are easy to hold
- Any thing else the IEP Team thinks will help your child.



Does your child need more help?

Sometimes schools put an adult with a child all day. This person is called an **educational assistant, para-professional** or **aide**. Their job is to help the student. This can be reading things out loud to them. It can be helping them eat or go to the bathroom. It can be to help them if they don't act right in class. If your child needs this kind of help, they should get it. But make sure it is really what they need.

Does the IEP Team want your child to have a para-professional? You need to ask these questions:

- Will the adult do things for your child that she or he could do alone?
- Does the adult talk for your child and choose for him or her?
- Does having an adult there make other students stay away from your child?
- When can your child be alone with other students?
- Can the adult move away from your child at times?
- Can your child get help from several people and not always the same adult?

It is important for your child to get the help he or she needs at school. An educational assistant can

help, but it must be carefully planned. You need to make sure your child has a chance to be with other children. Another student might help your child with some things.

Even if your child needs help, the assistant doesn't need to be there every minute. The IDEA law says it is OK if the assistant helps other students, too. But your child must get all the help he or she needs.

What if the school won't help your child?

One of the places below may help you. Or connect you with someone who can help you.

- In Metro Nashville Public Schools? Call **The Arc of Davidson County - 615-321-5699, ext. 35**. They may be able to help in other counties.
- **Legal Aid Society - 1-800-238-1443**. They help in some counties.
- **Nashville Prevention Partnership - 615-297-7635**
- Metropolitan Nashville Public Defender's Office, Juvenile Division, **The Kids' Rights Program - 615-880-3710**

Ask for our other brochures:

- Is your child having trouble in school?
- Who can get special education?
- What is an IEP?
- Does your child get in trouble in school?
- If you and the school disagree
- Can't get special education? A 504 Plan may help
- Your rights as the parent of a child in special education

NOTE: This information cannot take the place of advice from a lawyer. Each case is different and needs individual legal advice.

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